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**An American General Staff:  
An Idea Whose Time Has Come?**

**A Monograph  
by  
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# SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES

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Whose Time Has Come?

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DISCUSSION

## Abstract

**AN AMERICAN GENERAL STAFF: AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME?** By MAJ Bill Eisel, USA, 51 pages

The purpose of this monograph is to examine the adequacy of the current national military command and control structure, analyze examples of various European general staffs, and determine whether a general staff system would best suit America's future military requirements.

The monograph first examines the history of the European General Staff systems with an emphasis on the Prussian-German General Staff. The monograph then examines the effectiveness of these staffs, again with emphasis on the Prussian-German model, in the preparation for and the conduct of war. The monograph analyzes the current American Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and examines the contemporary shortcomings that led to periodic revisions. The monograph determines that the Prussian-German system did a superlative job of preparing its officers for war, and when military interests were properly subordinated to political concerns, this system performed as designed.

The monograph concludes that the current American JCS system still has significant problems that incremental Congressional revision has not corrected. The monograph further determines that a General Staff system, patterned on that of the Germans, would alleviate much of the problem. Despite evidence to the contrary, however, Congress and the American people continue to view a general staff system as a significant potential threat to America's democratic ideals.

The monograph recommends that, given continued Congressional and public opposition to a General Staff, fundamental changes be made to the current JCS system. Specific recommendations include eliminating the Joint Chiefs of Staff, creation of a permanent body of joint specialty officers to form the Joint Staff and serve on the unified and specified commands, and redesignating the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the Director of the Joint Staff.

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## Introduction

No major armed effort is better than the staff of the commander who is directing it.<sup>1</sup>

Military staffs exist to assist the commander in carrying out his responsibilities and can be traced back to the first ancient warrior chief who sought help or advice from one of his subordinates. Historians have identified the staff as a formal institution as early as 2000 B.C., when the Egyptian Pharaohs recorded accounts of intelligence gathering and sustained logistical efforts.<sup>2</sup> For most of history, however, staffs consisted of a few aides-de-camp, scribes for orders and map preparation, and perhaps a trusted friend or two for advice. As armies grew in size and complexity, it became obvious that an overall system was needed to administer to their requirements both in peace and war.<sup>3</sup>

In the early nineteenth century the Prussians instituted an officer professional development system to aid the sovereign in conducting war. From this evolved the Prussian, and later the German, General Staff. Over time, with constant refinement that produced an unparalleled military capability, this system became the envy of the rest of Europe's military establishments. In the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries many European countries - including the former Soviet Union - developed and instituted a general staff system that, like the Prussian one, exercised executive authority over the respective armed forces. Many of these countries continue to use the general staff system or a variant of it to this day.

At the conclusion of World War II, Congress enacted the National Security Act of 1947. This legislation created the Department of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and increased the authority of the Secretary of Defense over the services in an effort to reduce parochialism and increase the efficiency of the US military.' Because of continual Congressional perceptions of military inefficiency in the 1970's and through the mid-1980's, Congress enacted the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (hereafter Goldwater-Nichols). Still undetermined is whether the Congressionally-reorganized JCS offers the best solution, or whether an American General Staff would better serve American national security needs.

Because the Prussians (and later the Germans) developed and then later completely refined the general staff system, the monograph will examine and

concentrate on the development of this staff system and then pursue the development of representative examples of European General Staffs. This examination compares the ability of previous general staffs to meet their countries' military needs. It will include examples of how the general staffs contributed to military successes or failures.

Next, the debate over an American General Staff will be described. The study will examine the historical reasons for the lack of political and military enthusiasm for a general staff. It will discuss the impetus for reform dictated by Goldwater-Nichols and the adequacy of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. An examination of the need for the creation of a general staff, with an emphasis of the military failures that prompted the calls for military reform, will follow. Additionally, this section will study the purported merits of an American General Staff, and also will include the opinions from the executive and legislative branches of government.

Finally, the study will determine whether a general staff is both appropriate and feasible. If such a staff is warranted, this study will include a proposed structure. Regardless whether a general staff



is either appropriate or feasible, the monograph will identify those general staff attributes that the Department of Defense may find worthy of consideration.

## A History of The European General Staffs

The...essential purpose of a national General Staff...was to serve as Prussia's top military planning, coordinating, supervising agency, thereby assuring...that the Army was maintained in a state of optimum military readiness.<sup>5</sup>

While some semblance of a staff has existed for several hundred years, it existed primarily to serve the administrative and logistical needs of the commander.<sup>6</sup> Because wars consisted usually of a single army proceeding along a line of advance to confront a similarly styled opponent, an emperor or king usually served as commander-in-chief and neither wanted nor required operational assistance.<sup>7</sup> Since the responsibilities of today's staff encompass far more than only these areas, the Prussian system, with its operational planning emphasis, can be considered the genesis of the modern general staff.

Eighteenth century Prussia was rightly recognized as one of the preeminent military powers of Europe, defeating numerically superior foes time and again. Its success, however, was not due to any widespread military prowess; rather the credit belonged to the talents of Frederick the Great, arguably one of the seven or eight great military geniuses of all time.<sup>8</sup> And, as recognized by the French theorist Jacques de

Guibert,

[The Prussians] owe their successes to the ignorance of their enemies and to the cleverness of their King, and to a whole new science of maneuver, which he created. If, after the death of that King, whose genius alone (emphasis added) sustains the imperfect edifice of the government, he is succeeded by a weak and untalented king, we will see...that ephemeral power rejoin that medium rank warranted by its real means...<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, within two decades of the death of Frederick the Great, the Prussians were soundly defeated by Napoleon at Jena and Auerstadt in 1806. The French pursued the remnants and destroyed them the following year at Friedland.

Left to pick up the pieces was Major General Johann von Scharnhorst and Colonel Wilhelm von Gneisenau, survivors of the wars with Napoleon. The King appointed Scharnhorst to head the Military Reorganization Commission. Scharnhorst's charter was to reform the military in order to prevent such humiliating defeats in the future.<sup>10</sup> Over the next few years, Scharnhorst modified the membership of the commission: now included were Gneisenau, Boyen, Ruehle, Grolman, and Carl von Clausewitz. German history, for good reason, records this group as "The Reformers".<sup>11</sup>

The Reformers' objective was to institutionalize military genius and to perfect a system that would

perpetuate military excellence instead of depending on the vagaries of genetics to produce the lone military talent. To do this, the officers knew they would have to develop and implement a system that would far exceed the charter granted them by the emperor.

The Reformers proposed sweeping changes in how an army was raised, its officers prepared, and equally critical, how society and government must change if this future military was to be successful. First, if Prussia were to have any realistic hopes of countering Napoleon or other aggressors, the Prussian Army must field numbers comparable to her enemies. In the case of France, this meant better than 500,000. To generate such numbers, the Prussian Army would have to become the people's army. The king would have to agree to a new constitutional monarchy, replacing the feudal system of serfdom with something whereby the people became citizens of Prussia with both a vote and interest in her well-being. This newfound Prussian electorate would demonstrate and contribute support for the new military that they could view as its military.<sup>12</sup>

Once the political reforms were in place, the restructuring of the military and its command and

control apparatus could begin. Under Frederick the Great, the officer corps was closed to all save nobility. Frederick demanded little more than obedience and bravery from his officers, which was more than adequate so long as Frederick was available.

Under Scharnhorst's new people's army, opportunities to rise to high position would not be limited to the Junkerian aristocracy, a group that saw officership as a unique preserve and generally disdained education. Instead, the new military aristocracy would be one of talent and ability rather than one of birth.<sup>13</sup> It would reward intelligence and ability. The obvious benefits were twofold: first, it would compel the aristocratic officers to seek the education they had previously ignored; secondly, it would vastly increase the pool of qualified officers available for the new national military command and control apparatus.<sup>14</sup> The Reformers developed their new officer corps by opening the competitive examinations for commissioning to all ranks and establishing a series of military academies. Acceptance to these institutions was open to all who could pass the examination, regardless of social status.

To guard against the vagaries of the commander in

chief's military talents or lack thereof, Scharnhorst and the Reformers proposed the creation of the General Staff. This staff, subservient to the monarch, would be a collection of the most experienced and capable military minds that the nation could produce. New General Staff officers would be selected from the brightest of the young officers. Carefully and intensively educated in the fine arts as well as the military sciences, they would replace senior General Staff officers as they either retired or exceeded their capacity to serve.<sup>15</sup> Under this new system, a king with Frederick's talents would be complemented by the staff. If the ruler were essentially a political one with little or no military aptitude, he then could rely on this staff for competent generalship.<sup>16</sup> Later successes and failures of the general staff performance would be due largely to the military's adherence to the primacy of civilian leadership.

The role of the General Staff was an executive one. It planned, coordinated, and supervised the preparation of the military for war. The planning function required the staff to plan contingencies against all potential adversaries. Some of the plans were defensive, others offensive. The Prussian General

Staff also had the charter to coordinate the activities within and among the large formations - corps and divisions. Lastly, the staff had the authority to supervise the performance of lower echelons of command. While generally not interfering with the normal operations of these units, the general staff could and would move to intervene when circumstances or poor performance required it.<sup>17</sup>

This system, with minor modifications, existed until the end of World War II. While Germany today does not have a general staff *per se*, it does continue to recognize the value of specially trained and educated officers. Officers continue to receive this intensive and demanding education at the *Fuehrungsakademie* (Armed Forces Command and General Staff School) followed by specialized training for general staff selectees. The *Bundeswehr* continues to select these officers based on a series of rigorous service wide examinations, previous tactical proficiency and performance while in school.<sup>18</sup>

The expression "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery" is reflective of the esteem in which the Prussians were held. As a result of either warring with Prussia or observing the Prussian military in

action, all of the continental European powers adopted a system based upon and similar to that of the Prussians.

Prior to Napoleon, the French had developed a staff system organized along functional lines. Subsequent staff revisions by Napoleon to suit his particular needs served him well. As in the case of Frederick, however, when the genius departed, so did the efficiency of the support system.

The French recognized early in the nineteenth century that if they were to remain militarily viable, their staff system would need revamping. The French government created its own staff training school in 1818. Like the Prussian system, staff officers would rotate between staff and line assignments, giving them a complete officer development. In 1833, the French authorities revised the staff training system. Officers selected for General Staff duty would now serve exclusively on the General Staff. Concurrently, the French military instituted a new curriculum that emphasized the drafting of plans and maps over a broad educational foundation. The combination of elitism and a narrow educational focus now marked the staff as a closed society displaying a closed collective



mentality. As the French military attache in Berlin noted when contrasting the two general staff developments, "When compared with the [Prussian] Academy of War with its vast program, the [French staff schools] are only agricultural schools."<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, the French would not recognize the serious flaws of their general staff until the disastrous performances in the Crimean and Prussian Wars.<sup>20</sup>

The French did learn from their mistakes and instituted reforms in their staff education and development process. Officers now received a much broader education. They would rotate between general staff and line assignments. The French government created two military agencies in the late 1950's, still in existence today, to further increase the efficiency of military preparedness. Under the Prime Minister, the National Defense General Staff headed by a military officer, is directly responsible to the Prime Minister for a broad range of national defense topics. Below this staff is the Armed Forces General Staff, also headed by a chief of staff. His vested authority is an executive one, and far exceeds that normally associated with a chief of staff. In essence, he is the virtual

commander of the French military.<sup>21</sup>

Russia, and later the Soviet Union, owed most of its staff development and function theory to the Prussians and Germans. Tsar Peter the Great, a great admirer of the west, instituted the first Russian General Staff based on that of Sweden and Prussia. Subsequent Russian rulers refined the education and selection process to fix perceived shortcomings. After the 1917 revolution, the Communists of the Soviet Union patterned the Red Army Staff, later renamed the General Staff, on the German General Staff. The German influence on this staff should not be surprising, as the Germans provided much of the formal training of the Soviet officers in exchange for clandestine maneuver facilities in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet General Staff was subordinate in peacetime to the Ministry of Defense and to STAVKA, the highest decision making military body in the Soviet Union in time of war. The Secretary General of the Communist Party and a handful of top advisors served on this group. Directly below STAVKA was the General Staff which was charged with the basic strategic planning for the armed forces and determined specific missions for each service. The officers who comprised

the Soviet General Staff came from all arms and services. Their future promotions and assignments were dependent both on their respective organization's efficiency and their individual attention to Party matters.<sup>22</sup>

With only World War II to provide a complete wartime example, one can still deduce that the Soviet General Staff had an executive as well as an administrative function. Because the General Staff had the mission of preparing the plans to support the decisions of STAVKA, it would exercise the concomitant authority to assure compliance. It was not unusual to find a high ranking officer and assistants from the General Staff assuming control of the major unit about to conduct an operation.<sup>23</sup>

The last of the major continental powers, Austria-Hungary, also implemented a general staff closely modeled on the Prussian system. However, as with the previous Austrian staff system, this new staff continued to be composed of noblemen who were not necessarily qualified by intellect or ability to serve on such a body. While this staff served faithfully until the dissolution of the empire, it never attained the level of competency of its neighbors.<sup>24</sup>

Eventually, all the important armies of the world, with the exception of the British and Americans, adopted the example of the Prussian General Staff. It would seem that these democracies may have equated military efficiency as a manifestation of militarism; these fears of militarism held in check the potential of military efficiency.<sup>25</sup>

## **The Effectiveness of the European General Staffs**

[T]he task of the Great General Staff was not to produce geniuses, but to concentrate on the training of ordinary men who could display efficiency and common sense.<sup>26</sup>

Before weighing the benefits and disadvantages of a general staff, it is reasonable to assess its performance in peace and war. The Prussian General Staff system had almost forty years to develop and refine its procedures. In this time the Prussians educated and trained officers and placed them in both field and national staffs and commands.<sup>27</sup>

In its first major test, the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, the staff system acquitted itself well. With rough parity in disposable forces and equipment, the Prussians proved better led, trained and organized as they prepared for war. Moltke (the Elder), the Prussian Chief of Staff, believed his preparatory advantage would permit concentrating superior forces for a decisive victory in a Napoleonic, one-battle campaign.<sup>28</sup> He was correct. At a cost of 10,000 casualties, the Prussians inflicted losses of 40,000 on the Austrians at Koeniggratz, forcing the disorganized and demoralized Austrians to retreat and sue for peace.<sup>29</sup>

Four years later, in their second major test, the

Prussians again were victorious. The Franco-Prussian War lasted only seven weeks and removed the French as a serious threat to Prussia for almost thirty years. How did the Prussians win so handily? A comparison of military capabilities provides no insight. The training and wartime experience of the French soldier compared favorably to his Prussian counterpart. Individually, junior and senior French officers were considered gallant, competent and devoted.<sup>30</sup> The answer lies in Prussia's organizational and operational processes. Developed and sustained in peacetime, the Prussian military system was quicker to plan, react, and execute. Military units were mobilized under plans developed by the general staff and moved by rail under the auspices of the Railroad Department, a main section under the General Staff.<sup>31</sup> Field forces, from armies down, were commanded and staffed by extremely competent officers and were supported by an equally adept national level staff.

In contrast, the French were organized into eight separate corps headed by Napoleon III. After the first encounter, Napoleon hurriedly established two army headquarters. However, there were no corresponding army staffs and the army commanders had to use corps

staffs to direct army operations as well as perform the normal corps staff duties.<sup>32</sup>

It is the intervening years between 1872 and 1914 that saw changes in the general staff, its relationship to civilian authority and its eventual contribution to its demise and the devastating defeat of Germany in World War I. The General Staff as exemplified by Scharnhorst was subordinate to the War Ministry which in turn answered to the emperor. Later, with the advent of a constitutional monarchy, the military was also accountable to the Reichstag, or Parliament, which controlled financial resources.<sup>33</sup> But in 1883, under pressure from the General Staff, the Kaiser issued the *Immediatvortrag*, which granted the chief of staff unencumbered direct access to the emperor.<sup>34</sup>

The dangers of this are obvious. Enamored with its successes from 1866-1872, the General Staff demonstrated a confidence bordering on arrogance. It became more insular, disdainful and disregarding political considerations. The solutions it developed to growing problems with France and Russia were purely military; consequently, these plans were developed in consonance with no one outside the general staff. With the moderating influence exerted by both the Minister

of War and the Reichstag, potential military adventurism was held in check. Even a strong monarch could individually moderate the military. But the combination of a weak, susceptible emperor and an unchecked General Staff violated Clausewitz' dictum on the right and responsibility of the political body to decide war,<sup>35</sup> and plunged Germany into the first World War, one it had no realistic hope of winning.<sup>36</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this study to recount the World War in any detail. If the German General Staff blundered terribly in committing Germany to war, it did perform well once war started. When Russia entered the war earlier than expected, the staff was able to develop and implement a plan to rapidly move units from west to east, crush a numerically superior Russian army in short order, and at the same time maintain the *status quo* in the west. The German General Staff, unlike its foundering French and British opponents, developed and fielded two successful doctrines - the "elastic defense in depth" in 1916 and the "storm unit" offensive tactical doctrine of 1918.<sup>37</sup> Another measurement of German military effectiveness is its performance in the field. Given rough parity in the quality of soldier and equipment, any disparity in



performance should be due largely to training, tactics, and other matters related to staff work. The Germans mobilized some 11 million men and suffered approximately six million casualties. The Allies mobilized 28 million men and incurred some twelve million losses. Through another method, the "score effectiveness" or quantitative per-man capability of a force to inflict casualties upon its foe, one sees that the Germans demonstrated an unmatched combat superiority. Their score effectiveness on the western front was almost 1 1/2 times greater than the British, French and Americans; in the east, it was a staggering three to five times that of the Russians.<sup>38</sup>

World War II is not nearly so easily to analyze. Hitler knew that he would have to garner military support early on if his dreams of a German Empire were to reach fruition. Envious of the general staff, Hitler became outright distrustful of them after clashes on economic priorities and opposition to his plans for Poland and France. To negate the influence of the Army General Staff, the *Oberkommando des Heeres* or OKH, Hitler formed a national military general staff, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* or OKW, that would henceforth set national strategic objectives.

With himself installed as the supreme military commander and a staff of sycophants headed by the professionally unsuited Keitel, Hitler effectively removed OKH from any strategy discussions. From now on the General Staff would confine itself to operational and tactical matters.<sup>39</sup>

The lessons from the performance of the General Staff seem to be: when properly subordinated as military advisors to the civilian authority, the staff is extremely efficient in devising sound, relevant plans; when isolated in outlook and under no positive control, the General Staff can bring on misfortune. When the civilian leadership ignores the expertise of the general staff, military and political disaster is a probability. As evidenced in the examples of the two World Wars, however, the General Staff continued to serve important operational and tactical functions, certainly above that of their adversaries.

## The American General Staff Debate

The JCS are a product of history, not of logic.<sup>40</sup>

It is almost axiomatic that militarism in any country increases proportionately to the power of the Nation's general staff.<sup>41</sup>

American and Congressional reluctance to support sweeping military reform dates to colonial times, when the British Army and by extension its staff were seen as tyrannical and oppressive. Despite appeals for change from General Washington and his military successors, Congress controlled military management through a network of service departments and bureaus. Not until systemic organizational deficiencies revealed themselves during the Spanish-American War did Congress move to improve military organizational abilities through the implementation of individual service general staffs.<sup>42</sup> There is a certain amount of irony in the Congressional debates on the merits of a general staff. Congress used examples of the Prussian and German General Staff efficiency to push for the creation of an Army General Staff in 1903, and following World War II used the same body as an example of militarism and a threat to democracy to prevent a strong JCS and Joint Staff.<sup>43</sup>

What were the problems of the national military

command and control system that led to calls for reform that included replacing the current system with a general staff? The system, from 1947 until the present, consisted of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Staff, and the unified and specified commands. Each had identified shortcomings that demanded attention. The inadequacies of the first two are the focus of this study.

The major contemporary criticism of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is that the law required them to provide military advice based on consensus among them. Because the members of the JCS also represented a particular service, they usually expressed their opinion in terms of what was best for their service's interest. This resulted in a situation described by a former Chairman of the JCS, General David C. Jones:

The corporate advice provided by the Joint Chiefs of Staff is not crisp, timely, or very useful, or very influential. And that advice is often watered down and issues are papered over in the interest of achieving unanimity...Individual service interests too often dominate JCS recommendations and actions at the expense of broader defense interests."

Related to this problem was the manner in which the JCS conducted business. Most often an issue would be given to a Joint Staff action officer who would meet with comparable representatives from the four services for issue resolution. The pressure was to build agreement

over quality, and the process resulted in a carefully drafted paper that accommodated everyone.<sup>45</sup>

The second area needing major reform was that of the Joint Staff. First, the Joint Staff, because it worked for the Joint Chiefs of Staff rather than the Chairman, remained a captive of the services and lacked the independence to provide sufficiently broad and unbiased recommendations.<sup>46</sup> There was also a complaint by senior officers that the action officer assigned to the Joint Staff came usually ill-prepared to function at that level. Secondly, the tour length and lack of joint preparation generally resulted in an officer leaving the staff after two years - about the time he was becoming familiar with the requirements.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, he or she was generally not the services' best because the services usually reserved assignments for these officers either on their own staff or in key service billets.<sup>48</sup> The best officers also sought to avoid Joint Staff duty because it was not considered career enhancing. Those who did serve depended on their parent service for future promotion and assignments, and their performance was judged on how well they represented their service while on the Joint Staff.<sup>49</sup>

Recognizing that the current system was just too cumbersome for current realities, Congress mandated what some consider far-reaching changes in how the Department of Defense operates - the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Again, the focus of this discussion will be how those changes affected the Chairman, the Joint Chiefs and the Joint Staff.

The Chairman is now the principal military advisor to the National Command Authority (NCA).<sup>50</sup> He no longer must reach consensus among the Joint Chiefs before recommending options. He is also the transmitter of NCA decisions to the unified and specified combatant commanders, reducing the ability of the Joint Chiefs to influence decisions based on an individual service interest.

Congress also made sweeping changes in the operation, selection, training and tour length of the Joint Staff. First, the Joint Staff now works directly for the Chairman.<sup>51</sup> The individual services may review and provide comment on joint matters, but no longer must approve a particular position prior to its recommendation.

Secondly, Congress established a more

comprehensive education system for joint duty officers. The services are required to develop and institute joint training in all officer professional development schools. Furthermore, officers will complete a joint school, the Armed Forces Staff College, prior to being considered fully qualified.<sup>52</sup> In order to assure proper experience for the officer and adequate utilization by a joint organization, Goldwater-Nichols mandated a joint tour length of three and a half years for other than flag officers.<sup>53</sup>

To ensure that the services provided some of their best officers, Congress put some teeth into the bill. First, no one would be promoted to flag rank unless he or she were joint qualified. Secondly, promotions of officers serving in joint duty assignments would meet or exceed the promotion rates for the individual service's headquarters staff.<sup>54</sup>

There are still problems that either Goldwater-Nichols does not address or the services choose to ignore. Within the JCS, the Chairman must still present the advice or opinions of individual JCS members when those opinions differ from his.<sup>55</sup> This potentially dilutes the Chairman's position. Additionally, the service chiefs continue to be dual-

hatted as head of their respective service and a member of the JCS. There appears to be no resolution on potential conflicts of interest.

Within the Joint Staff and joint duty arenas, there still exist noteworthy shortcomings. First, while Congress mandated the tour length of officers, Goldwater-Nichols permits waivers, and very often a joint duty officer leaves far short of the designated tour length for a key assignment within his service.

Joint education is still suspect. While Congress intended that all services incorporate joint training in their professional development schools, it did not specify what was to be taught. The service intermediate level schools continue to focus on the tactical level of war. As a result, much of what the students study at their institution is irrelevant for operations at the joint level. The Armed Forces Staff College, the "finishing school" for joint officers, focuses mainly on joint staff policies and procedures rather than on warfighting at the joint (operational) level.<sup>56</sup> Currently, there are three intermediate level schools that prepare officers for duties at the joint/operational level: the Army's School of Advanced Military Studies, The Marines' School of Advanced



Warfighting, and the Air Force's School of Advanced Airpower Studies.<sup>57</sup> However, these schools have a service orientation and graduates are used for specific service requirements. Hence, what the Joint Staff and unified/specified joint staffs end up with are officers who are familiar with joint staff processes, but not joint warfighting. It appears, therefore, that the members of the Joint Staff will continue to offer a service perspective on joint issues.

Congress issued specific instructions in Goldwater-Nichols on promotion rates and the requirement to have at least one joint-qualified officer on the selection board. Despite this, officers serving joint duty continue to lag behind their service contemporaries in promotions. In the specific case of promotions to colonel (O-6), the Army has failed twice in the last four promotion boards to select Joint Staff officers at the same percentage as Army Staff officers. It is even worse for joint duty officers: they have been selected at a rate far below the service average three of the last four years.<sup>58</sup>

If the changes to the current system are not adequate, and another system - the general staff concept - offers potential resolution of these

continued deficiencies, why has the United States not adopted an organization patterned on a European General Staff? The answer lies in Congressional opposition to such a staff. Current Congressional opposition to an American General Staff is predicated along six premises: 1) a failure to systematically consider a full range of alternatives; 2) rigidity of thought; 3) attempt to control national policies beyond the normal purview of military concerns; 4) isolation of civilian authorities from other points of view; 5) erosion of civilian control of the military by the concentration of power in the hands of a few; and, 6) creation of an elite group of officers who disdain accountability.<sup>59</sup>

In the first instance, COL T.N. Dupuy's review of Prussian-German General Staff files reveals that this General Staff was genuinely objective in analyzing successes and failures of the German Army, compiling "lessons learned", and identifying shortcomings in planning methodologies as well as evaluating the proficiency of other militaries.<sup>60</sup>

To the second objection there is no basis in fact. The founders of the Prussian-German General Staff designed its educational system to include a wide range of subjects, including the humanities, in the

curriculum. Furthermore, to encourage independent and creative thought, senior general staff officers went to great lengths to encourage "intellectual individualism" among their subordinates.<sup>61</sup>

The third concern, attempt to control national policy, has some merit. In World War I, in the absence of either a strong monarch or the moderating influence of a minister of war or parliament, the military became the de facto leader. This, however, was more a result of the kaiser's abdication than a usurpation on the part of the military. Additionally, this scenario has only a remote feasibility for the United States given its well established control of the military by the President and Congress.<sup>62</sup> This argument certainly has no validity with regard to World War II. As outlined previously, Hitler established firm control of the military as well as all facets of government. The General Staff had no say in national policy or direction. They concerned themselves with purely operational matters.

There is no historical evidence to support the fourth and fifth instances - isolation of civilian officials and erosion of civilian control. History reveals that a general staff has remained subservient

to autocracies and democracies alike. Indeed, the same men who established the Prussian General Staff also championed democratic reforms of the monarchy.<sup>63</sup> Those who oppose JCS reform on this issue cannot use the German World War II example. While certainly not innocent of aggression and, in the case of some, atrocities, the generals in no way ever jeopardized Hitler's control of the armed forces.<sup>64</sup>

The last point, creation of an elite body of specialists, is somewhat perplexing. One must, however, make a distinction between "elite" (the choice or best of anything considered collectively, especially of a group) and "elitist" (excessive pride in belonging to a select or favored group).<sup>65</sup> In all probability a national general staff would be viewed as an elite organization, and therefore attract many of the best officers. But one of the current criticisms of the Joint Staff is that many of the same caliber officers seek to avoid assignment to it.<sup>66</sup> The military already has elite units and officers and touts them. The Army's Rangers and Special Forces, the Navy's SEAL units and others advertise their members as being a cut above the average. Concurrently, the select officers of the Army's School of Advanced Military Studies and

the Air Force's School of Advanced Airpower Studies are both intensively educated and subsequently sought after. The military is supposed to both reflect and reward merit and achievement. The armed forces exist to perform a mission, not to appease its members. Lastly, there is doubt that any jealousy over service on an American General Staff would debilitate the services' ability to function.<sup>67</sup>

While Congress has opposed a general staff in particular, it also has concerns over military abuse in general. Throughout history the potential of military power has diminished or threatened civil authority directly or indirectly. In some, as in the case of several Latin American countries, the military has seized control outright. In others, a single military leader has taken actions beyond his authority.<sup>68</sup> Congressional debate has included two theories of threats to civil-military relations, "The Man on a White Horse" and a single commander exceeding his authority, in its debate on general staffs.

"The Man on the White Horse" theory offers that a single military officer, through personal authority and great charisma, wrests control from civilian authority. In American history, three such individuals come to

mind. The first, George Washington, had a grateful citizenry try to make him king. He refused, preferring instead to return to private life now that his military obligation was over and the country safe.<sup>69</sup> The second, George McClellan, was an immensely popular general with both with his soldiers and the public. When fired by Lincoln, he conceivably could have taken his army and seized Washington. He did not. Instead, he went into politics and later ran (unsuccessfully) for President.<sup>70</sup> The last example is Douglas MacArthur. His relief by President Truman during the Korean War caused a great furor with the public and with Congress. Various committees held hearings on the matter. While there was criticism by many for Truman's action, none came from MacArthur himself. What could have evolved into a constitutional crisis for the nation became merely a political problem of the Truman Administration.<sup>71</sup>

The next theory considered is a commander taking actions beyond his authority. While many think of a cataclysmic act such as that depicted in the popular film *Dr. Strangelove*, nothing remotely so serious has occurred. The most prevalent examples are of officers expressing political opinions beyond a carefully

defined limit. In one case, President Kennedy admonished Major General Edwin Walker, commander of the 24th Infantry Division, for distributing right wing propaganda and making comments critical of the Kennedy Administration's policies. He subsequently retired from the military. In a second instance, Major General John Singlaub, serving as Chief of Staff of the US-Korean Combined Forces Command, made comments critical of the Carter Administration's announcement on force reductions in Korea. He also later retired.<sup>72</sup> In neither case did either of the officers pose any threat to civilian control or authority.

Throughout American history there has been a steadfast belief by military and civilian leaders in the primacy of civilian control. The Steadman Report on the national military command structure concludes:

We find that the concept of civilian control over the military is unquestioned throughout the Department. It is a non-issue. Our forces are fully responsive to the command and control of the duly constituted civilian authorities...<sup>73</sup>

The Senate Armed Services Committee Staff agreed. It reached two important conclusions in its report on the need for change within the Department of Defense: first, the concept of civilian control of the military is unquestioned throughout the armed services today and that fears of a military threat to democratic

principles are unfounded;<sup>74</sup> secondly, that Congressional fears of the dangers of an American General Staff were unfounded, that changes in the staff system would signal both a strong confidence in the history of civilian-military relations and a deeper understanding of the nature of future wars.<sup>75</sup>



## Conclusions and Recommendations

The Joint Staff shall not operate or be organized as an overall Armed Forces General Staff and shall have no executive authority."

This exact wording above has appeared in the National Security Act Amendment of 1949, the DoD Reorganization Act of 1958, and Goldwater-Nichols. Congress has consistently prohibited the formation of a European model general staff; that is, one with executive authority. Yet the current system still has shortcomings, ones that an American General Staff appear to correct. It appears, however, that Congress will address these deficiencies only after a demonstrated inability to accomplish a mission. Rather than offer incremental solutions, Congress and the executive branch should insist on a comprehensive solution - a general staff concept incorporating the best of the European models while carefully preserving and safeguarding the American principle of civilian control. Given both the future nature of war and an era of decreasing resources, an American General Staff would enhance the nation's probability of decisive victory with minimal losses.

Unfortunately, whether the fears of a usurpation of power by such an organization are valid or not is

moot at this point. The relevant question is what, if anything, can be done in order to improve the current national military structure?

First, dissolve the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Dual-hatting the service chiefs and asking them to do what is best for their individual service and DoD is both unrealistic and unfair. Return them to their individual services and let them focus on what they do best - man, organize, equip, train and sustain their organizations.

Secondly, reorganize the Joint Staff. This is the most controversial recommendation. In the future, select outstanding officers from among the various services, preferably in the rank of military captain/naval lieutenant. These officers, selected by the Director or a joint committee, would be assigned permanently to the Joint Staff and would wear a new, service-immaterial uniform. These officers would not return to their parent service. They would serve as the "nervous system and brain"<sup>27</sup> of the defense establishment, a repository of institutional joint knowledge and staff experience. Their assignments would be limited to either the Joint Staff or the staff of one of the specified or unified commands. The

Department of Defense would intensively educate these officers in joint and operational art, either using existing schools or establishing new ones. The Armed Forces School of Advanced Operational Studies proposed by MAJ Vince Brooks would serve admirably as one of these institutions.<sup>76</sup>

To ensure fair and adequate promotion possibilities, DoD would establish joint promotion boards to consider these officers. Officers represented equally from the services could comprise the promotion boards; records considered would contain no data on the individual's original service.

Next, redesignate the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the Director of the Joint Staff. He would still be the principal advisor to the National Command Authority, and he would be unencumbered with having to dilute his advice with the diverging opinions of the Joint Chiefs. The new Director of the Joint Staff would still have no executive authority. The current system of combatant command exercised by the unified and specified commanders would be retained. The President or Secretary of Defense would still transmit orders to the CINCs via the Director of the Joint Staff.

How may one evaluate the proposed changes? The criteria currently used by the Joint Chiefs when considering changes serve this purpose well:<sup>79</sup>

- "Would the change improve the nation's ability to wage war?"<sup>80</sup> Almost certainly. A cadre of professional officers trained and serving exclusively in the joint arena can only enhance the ability of the national authorities' and CINCs' abilities to plan and conduct operations.<sup>81</sup>

- "Would the change ensure that the President and the Secretary of Defense receive better and more timely advice?"<sup>82</sup> Removing the service chiefs, who receive most of their advice from individual and therefore single issue staffs, should expedite and focus the advice the National Command Authority receives. The Joint Staff would research and provide advice from a joint perspective; the services would receive the Director's position after the fact.<sup>83</sup>

- "Would the change ensure that the requirements of the CINCs would be better met?"<sup>84</sup> The CINCs would almost certainly benefit from a cadre of professionally assessed and trained joint officers familiar with the myriad of unique joint procedures.<sup>85</sup>

- "Would the change improve the Defense

Department's ability to allocate resources wisely and efficiently?"<sup>86</sup> It would seem that professional joint staff officers would be better able to determine the requirements of multi-service warfighting and coordinate the design specifications of those requirements, thereby conserving increasingly scarce fiscal resources.<sup>87</sup>

- "Would the change affect civilian control of the military?"<sup>88</sup> Absolutely not. These recommendations make no proposals affecting the chain of command whatsoever. The National Command Authority still controls the military. The Director of the Joint Staff, as did the Chairman, would continue to serve as a conduit for the orders from the NCA to the warfighting CINCs.

While an American General Staff would seem to best enhance military efficiency, Congressional opposition to an American General Staff appears resolute. Therefore, stronger revisions are probably neither possible nor desired. The hope is that it will not take another series of military misfortunes to recognize that change is needed.

The nature of future wars has indeed changed. President Eisenhower noted in 1958 that "...separate

ground, sea, and air warfare is gone forever. [If we go to war again], we will fight it as one single element"(emphasis added).<sup>89</sup> Today's Joint Pub 1 states that "future warfare is synonymous with joint warfare... [J]oint teams must be trained and ready prior to combat."<sup>90</sup> It is important that everyone involved - the executive, the military and the legislative branches - understand future warfare and support measures, such as an American General Staff, that reflect the changing nature of combat.

## Endnotes

1. James D. Hittle, The Military Staff, (Harrisburg, 1952), p. 299.
2. Ibid., pp. 6-13.
3. Trevor N. Dupuy, A Genius for War: The Prussian and German General Staff 1807-1945, (Englewood Cliffs, 1977), p. 46. pp. 25-26.
4. Staff Report to The Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, Defense Reorganization: The Need for Change, (Washington, D.C., 1985), pp. 139-140. I am indebted to Mr. Arnold L. Punaro, Staff Director for the Senate Armed Services Committee, who provided not only his personal views on this subject, but also provided this document, which his staff prepared for the deliberations on the need to reorganize DoD and the JCS.
5. Dupuy, p. 46.
6. Staff Report, pp. 246-247.
7. Martin van Creveld, Command in War, (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 25-27.
8. Dupuy, p. 13.
9. Jacques A.H. de Guibert, Defense of the Modern Military System, (Paris, 1805), Vol I, p. 91.
10. Dupuy, p. 20.
11. Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff 1657-1945, (New York, 1957), pp. 50-57. A quick list of these men's contributions: Gneisenau, a protege of Scharnhorst, brought first rate conceptual and organizational abilities; Boyen, former War Minister, championed and labored for the creation of a strong reserve system; Grolman drove the scientific and intellectual development of the officer corps; Clausewitz role on the Commission is less defined, his future contributions do not need reiteration.
12. Ibid., pp. 29-31.

13. Dupuy, pp. 25-28.
14. Ibid., p. 28.
15. Ibid., pp. 28-29. The Prussian staff education system emphasized history, philosophy and theory as well as geography, mechanical sciences and physics.
16. Ibid., p. 45.
17. Ibid., pp. 46-48.
18. Christian O.E. Millotat, Understanding the Prussian-German General Staff System, (US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, 1992), pp. 9-14.
19. Hittle, p. 119.
20. Ibid., pp. 116-118.
21. Ibid., pp. 127-128.
22. Harriet F. Scott and William F. Scott, The Armed Forces of the USSR, (Boulder, 1979), pp. 102-109.
23. Hittle, pp. 281-283.
24. Dupuy, pp. 113-114.
25. Ibid., p. 114.
26. Goerlitz, p. 127.
27. Dupuy, pp. 112-113.
28. Ibid., p. 76.
29. Ibid., pp. 85-86.
30. Ibid., p. 99.
31. Ibid., p. 65. Contrary to Americans' belief, they were not the first to recognize and exploit the railroad in the Civil War. The Prussians had recognized the potential in the 1840s and established the Railroad Department in 1859, two year before the beginning of the Civil War.



32. Ibid., pp. 96-97.
33. Goerlitz, pp. 34-35, 94.
34. Ibid., p. 97.
35. Carl von Clausewitz, On War, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, 1976), p. 605.
36. Dupuy, pp. 140-142.
37. Timothy T. Lupfer, "The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War," Combat Studies Institute, Ft. Leavenworth, 1981, p. vii. Lupfer's study emphasizes the significance of these tactical changes conducted during the ongoing war.
38. Dupuy, pp. 177-178. For a definitive explanation of this analytical model and for specific examples using WWI data, see Appendix C of this work.
39. Williamson Murray, "JCS Reform: A German Example?," National War College Review, Nov-Dec 1985, pp. 36-38. An example of the low esteem other officers held Keitel was his nickname "Lakeitel", a play on the German word lakei or lackey.
40. John Kester, "The Future of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," quoted in Staff Report to the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, Defense Reorganization: The Need for Change, (Washington, D.C., 1985), p. 267.
41. Senator Robertson, Unification of the Armed Services, Remarks in the House, Congressional Record, v. 93, July 19, 1947, pp. 9436-9437, quoted in Staff Report to the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, Defense Reorganization: The Need for Change, (Washington, D.C., 1985), p. 260.
42. Hittle, pp. 166-200.
43. Staff Report, pp. 254-270.

44. GEN David C. Jones, quoted by William S. Lind, "JCS Reform: Can Congress Take on A Tough One?," Air University Review, Sep-Oct 1985, p. 48.
45. GEN David C. Jones, "Why the Joint Chiefs of Staff Must Change," Armed Forces Institute, March 1982, pp. 65-66.
46. William J. Lynn and Barry R. Posen, "The Case for JCS Reform," International Security, Winter 1985-86, p. 74.
47. Jones, p. 67.
48. Staff Report, p. 182.
49. Lynn and Posen, 76-77.
50. US House of Representatives Report, House-Senate Conference Report on, "The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986," Government Printing Office, 1986, p. 92.
51. Ibid., p. 38.
52. Ibid., p. 38.
53. Ibid., p. 96.
54. Ibid., p. 40.
55. Ibid., p. 93.
56. Vincent K. Brooks, "Knowledge is the Key: Educating, Training, and Developing Operational Artists for the 21st Century," MMAS Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, AY 1991-1992, p. 44.
57. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
58. Jim Tice, "Joint duty proves no help at promotion time," Army Times, February 15, 1993, p. 8.
59. Staff Report, p. 231.
60. Ibid., pp. 304-305.

61. Dupuy, pp. 304-307.
62. Staff Report, p. 232.
63. Ibid., p. 233.
64. John M. Nolen, "JCS Reform and the Lessons of German History," Parameters, Spring 1982, p. 19.
65. The Random House College Dictionary, (New York, 1982), p. 429.
66. Staff Report, p. 182.
67. John Kester, "Designing a US Defense Staff," Strategic Review, Summer 1981, p. 43.
68. Staff Report, p. 27.
69. Ibid., pp. 29-30.
70. Ibid., pp. 33-35, 41.
71. Ibid., pp. 38-39.
72. Ibid., p. 41.
73. *National Military Command Structure Study*, directed by Richard C. Steadman, June 1978, quoted in Staff Report, p. 42.
74. Staff Report, p. 45.
75. Ibid., pp. 269-270.
76. House-Senate Conference Report, p. 20.
77. Richard Gabriel, Military Incompetence, (New York, 1985), pp. 12-13.
78. Brooks, pp. 44-45. The monograph makes a convincing argument for the establishment of a "Joint SAMS" to realistically meet the nation's warfighting needs of the future.
79. Louis J. Moses, The Call for JCS Reform, (Washington, D.C., 1985), p. 49.

- 80. Ibid., p. 49.
- 81. Staff Report, pp. 176-177.
- 82. Ibid., p. 49.
- 83. Ibid., pp. 158-159, 177-178.
- 84. Ibid., p. 49.
- 85. Ibid., pp. 162-163, 165.
- 86. Ibid., p. 49.
- 87. Ibid., pp. 161-162.
- 88. Ibid., p. 49.
- 89. President Eisenhower's special message submitted to Congress, April 3, 1958, quoted in Brooks, p. 4.
- 90. Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the US Armed Forces, Washington, D.C., 1991), pp. iii, 1-3.

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